



HB 186
Victim Services Programs – Supplementing Federal Funding and Support
(Victim’s Services Stabilization Act)

Appropriations Committee
January 31, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 186 which would provide for the development, support and continuity of victim services programs by supplementing federal funding when the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding fluctuates.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors. We recognize the societal and individual importance of providing victims of crime with trauma-informed, high-quality services.

VOCA funds are used across the state of Maryland to provide services such as counseling, advocacy, domestic violence shelters, child advocacy centers, support for rape victims at the hospital, and victim-witness support in court. The types of crime victims receiving services include sexual assault survivors, victims of elder abuse, human trafficking survivors, domestic violence victims, abused and neglected children, family members of homicide victims and others. These are all vital services to vulnerable populations.

Catholic Charities provides VOCA funded services to 280 clients a year through our Immigration Legal Services (ILS) at the Esperanza Center. ILS provides weekly consults to immigrant victims of crime where we help them understand if they are eligible to apply for immigration benefits, help them obtain documents from the policy department and courts, connect with resources and partner organizations and provide information about victim compensation, victim’s rights and victim notification services. We also assist clients who are testifying against their assailants in criminal court to navigate the process.

If an individual becomes one of our clients after the consultation, we are able to assist them in applying for immigration benefits, seek deferred action, obtain lawful work permits, assist with family reunification, respond to US Customs and Immigration Services correspondence and eventually apply for green cards. We also represent clients in Baltimore’s immigration court.

Without the stabilization funding provided in this bill, we would have to severely curtail our services to immigrant crime victims leaving them without crucial supports as they navigate a foreign environment. **For the reasons listed above, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 186.**

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy